

POSTSCRIPTS by Jack Post

Combine a spring morning and a crowd of enthusiasts working together, and things really move. That's what happened over at Duxbury Beach last Saturday, when just about every combination of Duxbury people that you could imagine, plus a few friendly outsiders, lugged pails and shovels down past the third telephone pole toward the Gurnet and began planting some of the estimated 50,000 beach grass seedlings on the slopes of the eroded dunes.

Spring morning? Well, perhaps by the calendar, but out there on the beach the raw wind occasionally turned the drizzling rain into stinging sleet, an atmospheric condition that should have discouraged even the faithful few who can be counted on to perform their civic duty. Yet what happened? Not a mere handful, but over 150 workers showed up, with enough of them staying through the long day to plant somewhere between 60,000 to 70,000 beach grass slips.

The volunteer rattling off the wooden bridge onto the beach parking lot signed in with checker Ralph Blakeman and headed for the work crew of his choice along the dunes to the south. Down the sandy track somewhere you met conservation officer Neal Merry towing a trailer stacked with bundled slips of grass (100 to a bundle it was supposed to be, but by actual count 120 or more), and a drum of fresh water to fill the pails. Or maybe you would come upon Richie Poole, in the truck that he had driven all Thursday night to New Jersey, then back on Friday with the load of seedlings. Anyhow, here were the materials ready to hand; so into each pail went water, then a bundle of grass. With all the exposed sand back of the dunes, between the snow fences, and around the Christmas tree barricades swarming with planters, you simply joined the army, digging if you carried a shovel, placing the slips in the holes and setting them if you did not.

John Nash or Al Krahmer checked their own efforts just long enough to explain to you that several stalks should be dropped into each hole, then sand firmly tamped around the roots. Keep the holes about 6" deep and staggered about 18" apart. You didn't get many holes dug before someone was right behind with an armful of shoots, placing them swiftly; and when you paused to straighten your back, you could look behind at the wisps being set by more volunteers following up the row.

Everyone worked out a technique of his own, some excavating wide holes, others forming slits; some dropping the plants down almost from a trot, others lowering the shoots gently, then using their feet to fill in and compact, still others progressing painfully from hole to hole on hands and knees. Every age was involved, from the small, chubby ones zooming in on the luscious doughnuts of the coffee wagon, through the middle and high school kids operating at intense speed in short bursts of energy, to the steady rhythm of the adults or the intermittent but determined effort of the seniors. Fishermen strode down the beach, too, heading for some choice bend in the channel, oblivious to the activity in the dunes, which had also drawn a handful of sightseers to wonder at children, teen-agers and grown-ups all slaving in harmony in the sand!

Come noon, the sleety rain beat down a little harder. With something over half the seedlings planted, would the morning shift come back after lunch to finish the job, or would they take note of their aching backs and quit? Everyone knew it would be most difficult to round up another gang for Sunday.

At one o'clock the planks of the bridge began to sound to car after car. By 2 the crews were full again, supplemented by fresh volunteers. In the 2 supply cars, the bundles of grass dwindled steadily as more and more exposed stretches turned into tufted grass almost as good as the experimental patches that the volunteers from Habitat up in Belmont had helped plant last year. Finally the south side was finished, from High Pines all the way back to the parking lot, and everyone was beginning to relax, when word came that one more sector toward the north end of the parking lot would just about use up the last of the grass.

One group after another trudged over and again started to plant, in sand loaded with heavy beach pebbles, the toughest digging and filling of all. By 5 most of the mothers with children had left, but the last determined squads labored on until dusk, when triumphantly the last holes were filled, the last sprouts tamped into place, and a major skirmish in the battle of the beach had been won.

Grass Planting A Success



One volunteer field team gets a brief planting technique demonstration.

The volunteer beach grass planting project was an overwhelming success. 50,000 culms (about 1 ton) were set in one day.

Over 150 volunteers didn't seem to mind the cold, rainy, ideal planting weather. Several senior citizens, active in town projects, commented that this volunteer effort was the largest and most successful they could remember.

The DHS and Intermediate

School student turnout was impressive. Additional school beach presentations are planned before the academic year ends.

Should you be missing tools or have someone else's, please call Neal Merry, B.C.O., (934-2437).

The photos above show some of the days activity. For more information see Jack Post's "Postscripts" in this issue. Watch the Clipper for our next effort.



Beach grass sand anchors being planted by a few of the 150 volunteers.

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, April 11, 1974